

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 15, 2013**

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Dear Senator Toni Harp and Representative Toni Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am writing to you today in reference to the Governor's proposed budget in relation to the funding for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

I am particularly concerned about, and oppose, the funding cuts for the line item for legal services (for the Connecticut Legal Rights Project) of \$280,000 for each of the next two fiscal years, and eliminating the increase CLRP received for their work under the consent decree which established the organization.

CLRP's mission is to protect the rights of people with psychiatric disabilities, both those who are inpatients in facilities that received funding from DMHAS and, even more importantly, those individuals who are living in the community. The housing work they do is absolutely vital to maintaining the roofs over the heads of their clients. They are the lawyers of last resort - when local legal services offices are unable to take cases because of their own staffing limitations, CLRP is the office that steps in to assist those clients who have psychiatric disabilities to help them avoid eviction. The best thing about CLRP is that they often get involved in cases at a much earlier stage in the process, before cases get to court, and help clients access needed services and support, so that their lives are improved even beyond their immediate legal crisis. When a person can maintain their housing, it allows them to maintain their recovery.

It saddens me that the Governor's budget proposes eliminating funding for School-Based Health Centers (SBHC) in the wake of what happened in Newtown in December. On the one hand, he talks about the need for additional mental health services, especially for our young people. SBHC allows those youngsters access to services where they are, so this really makes no sense. I oppose cutting this funding.

For the same reason, I do not understand, and oppose, the Governor's proposed elimination of funding for research at the Connecticut Mental Health Center.

The Governor's proposal to make permanent, and annualize, the rescission and deficit mitigation cuts, is something I also oppose.

The Governor's proposal is not without merit. There are several proposals I would like to thank him for, and hope that you will support.

Increased funding for Young Adult Services. There is no question that mental health services for young adults is more important than ever. Access must be improved. This will cost money. Funding must be increased.

We need more placements for people with acquired or traumatic brain injuries, which also requires increased funding. This will also help our veterans who are returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Increased funding for the discharge fund for patients at Connecticut Valley Hospital is necessary. Patients should not have to remain in the hospital any longer than is absolutely necessary - if all that is prevented from leaving the hospital is insufficient money, then more money should be provided.

Supportive housing ultimately saves Connecticut money. The Governor, and the legislature, have wisely recognized this, and that is why funding for this has been provided in the past. Continued, and increased, investment in supportive housing creates permanent and affordable housing and will enable people with disabilities to live successfully in the community.

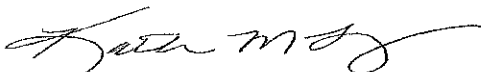
We all want our health care system to work better, more efficiently, and at a lower cost. The Health Home Initiative is designed to better coordinate behavioral and physical healthcare for clients served by DMHAS, and that is why I support new funding (\$10 million) for this program. This investment by the state of Connecticut will bring additional revenue to the state -- \$50 million in additional revenue over the biennium due to a 90% federal match available under the Affordable Care Act. This is a wise investment of the state's resources.

I support increased funding for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) because I believe that people live best when they live in the place of their choice - and for most of us, that is at home, in our communities, and not in an institution.

The people who work at private non-profit providers and provide services to people living with disabilities have lived many years without raises because of lack of funding. They deserve a cost of living adjustment. It is hard work. Granted, doing this work has the reward of knowing that one is doing good, but money pays the bills.

I appreciate your support for increased funding for the programs that are necessary to the continued well being of people living with psychiatric disabilities in the state of Connecticut, and urge you to fight the proposed cuts in funding to those programs that are absolutely vital to their survival.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter May", is located at the bottom of the page.